



YOUR KINGDOM COME  
REFLECTIONS ON FAITH, JUSTICE AND HOPE

*Peter Sills*

# YOUR KINGDOM COME!

*Reflections on Faith, Justice and Peace*

Peter Sills

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*Cover illustration*  
The Mustard Tree

*How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed; when sown in the ground it is smaller than any other seed, but once sown, it springs up and grows taller than any other plant, and forms branches so large that birds can roost in its shade.*

Jesus of Nazareth  
(Mark 4.30-32)

Cover design by Lisa Gifford

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***Also by Peter Sills***

*Your Kingdom Come* is the third booklet in an occasional series of meditations and addresses. The others are: *My Strength and My Song* (1991), *A Word in Season* (2001), and *Deep Calls to Deep* (2015). For details of these and Peter's other publications visit: [www.peter-sills.co.uk](http://www.peter-sills.co.uk)

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# PREFACE

A longing for the Kingdom of God to come on earth as it is in heaven echoes throughout the Bible, and the coming of the Kingdom is the main theme of Jesus' teaching. In parables and miracles he gave glimpses of what the Kingdom is like and taught the people to discern the signs of its coming. This longing has continued down the ages as people become aware of the gap between their hope for a just and peaceful society and the actual state of the world. It may be that the Kingdom will never come on earth as it is in heaven, but that does not prevent us yearning that it might and working for the day when it does.

This yearning is part of what it means to be human; it will never go away, and it is part of the function of religion to give it content, and to give strength and hope to those who work and pray for its realisation. These reflections are offered in the conviction that God is the Lord of all life, public as well as private, and that faith must shape political conviction and public policy, and not the other way round as more often seems to be the case. This was, of course, the conviction of the Old Testament prophets who spoke truth to power.

These reflections were written in the opening years of this millennium which have been dominated by the events of 9/11 and the rise of militant Islam, and these issues are addressed in the second part, Learning from Terror. There is also a great and growing concern about the effects of climate change, and the third part, Caring for the Earth, reflects on this. But underlying these issues is a deeper concern about the nature of our society, and the way economic ideas dominate the public arena, and this is the subject of the first part, Renewing the Spirit. We also commemorated in 2005 the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, and in I conclude with two pieces on Remembrance in the fourth part, the second specially written for this booklet.

The theme that links these reflections is the belief that humans are essentially spiritual beings, and that rulers and ruled alike need to take

this seriously. The rise of Islam as a force in the world, both political and moral, has brought a timely reminder that the religious view of the life has not faded away, and for many millions it remains their principal point of reference in their understanding of events. Like the prophets, the preacher responds to events; he does not have time to cover every point and so what is said here falls short of a complete statement, and inevitably there is some repetition. Even so, I hope these reflections will help those who seek a faithful response to contemporary events in their thinking and praying.

Peter Sills

St Francis' Day, 200

# RENEWING THE SPIRIT

## I Praying for the Kingdom

*'Thy kingdom come...on earth as in heaven.'*

*(Matthew 6.10)*

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray the first thing he told them to ask for was that God's kingdom should come on earth as in heaven. What does it mean to ask for this, to pray for the coming of the kingdom?

The word 'kingdom' is misleading. It suggests a state, like the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Something along these lines – establishing a Christian state – was attempted in the Middle Ages with the Holy Roman Emperor presiding over a Christian empire; and the word 'Christendom' has passed into our vocabulary. It is the kind of idea we tend to have in mind when we think about the kingdom. But that is not what Jesus was asking us to pray for. The Greek word translated as 'kingdom' has a dynamic, not a static character. 'Kingly rule', or 'kingly reign', convey its sense better. When Jesus taught about the kingdom he used dynamic images: farmers sowing, seeds growing, people searching, harvesters reaping, fishermen fishing. These are pictures of growth and change, challenge and fulfilment, in a word, of transformation. To pray for the coming of the kingdom is to pray for the transformation of the world so that we experience the kingly rule of God on earth as in heaven.

What might God's kingly rule be like? We need look no further than Jesus; he is the embodiment of God's kingly rule, which he declared to have begun with his ministry: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.' (*Mark 1.15*) His ministry began a new relationship between God and his people. That new relationship was seen above all in the way Jesus taught us to look on God as a loving father. He used the children's affectionate word 'Abba' to

address God, and taught us to do the same. So, while he took a strict view of sin, looking to intention rather than deed, he was merciful to those who sinned. Although he said, 'If a man looks on a woman with a lustful eye, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart' (*Matt 5.28*), when a woman taken in adultery was brought before him he refused to condemn her.

He was noted for the company he kept, but not in the usual way. He reached out to the poor, the outcast, tax gatherers and sinners, for it was them who needed him more than the righteous. He brought God close to the ordinary people and they hung upon his words, and when he spoke about himself he used the image of the shepherd, an occupation despised by the religious people of his day. At the end of his ministry, when he came to the Temple he drove out the traders and the money-changers, thereby overthrowing the barriers that surrounded religion with a culture of racial exclusiveness. 'My house,' he said, 'shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.' (*Mark 11.17*)

In public life and in private life, before God and with men, Jesus transformed the relationships of those around him. So, when we pray 'thy kingdom come' we are asking that our relationships also be transformed and made new. Do we find it hard to see God as a loving father? If so, our prayer for the kingdom asks for a deeper experience of his love. Do we condemn those who sin, over-looking our own sinfulness? If so, our prayer for the kingdom asks that we become more merciful and less hypocritical. Do we like to keep ourselves to ourselves, looking down on the poor and those who haven't quite made it? If so, our prayer for the kingdom asks God to soften our hearts with his compassion. Do we fear and mistrust those from different races and cultures? If so, our prayer for the kingdom asks God to help us rejoice in the diversity and gifts of all his peoples.

Praying for the kingdom is to express a longing, a deep want to become the same kind of person as Jesus. It is to open ourselves up to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit so that God's kingly rule is enthroned in our lives. But the kingdom is more than this; it is not simply a new

disposition within our hearts, a feeling that God is close to us. The Kingdom will not come simply through our efforts of personal transformation, important though they are; it is not something that we do. First and foremost, the coming of the kingdom is an act of God himself; but is also an act in which his human creation have their part to play. God is continually at work in the world, striving to shape his creation so that it reflects his glory; the kingdom, his kingly rule, is his initiative in breaking the power of evil, and he invites our response. We can see this in the images Jesus used to teach about the kingdom. The way God is at work is seen in the image of the seed growing secretly: 'A man scatters seed on the ground; he goes to bed at night and gets up in the morning, and meanwhile the seed sprouts and grows – how, he does not know. The ground produces a crop by itself....' (*Mark 4.26-28*) Here Jesus describes a process of change and growth which the farmer begins, but in which he plays no essential part. The seed and the soil contain within them the qualities that bring forth growth as the seed is transformed into the full plant. In the same way God plants the desire for the kingdom in our hearts, he gives us personal qualities which, if allowed to grow, will transform our lives and touch those around us and the world in which we live. In other images the human role is more active, like a man looking for buried treasure or a merchant looking for fine pearls. (*Matthew 13.44-46*) Here we see the importance of persistence in desire for the kingly rule of God, and the way our personal skills (for example, the merchant's ability to recognise a fine pearl) are part of our endowment in working for its realisation. And when we do respond to God in this way, he gives the increase. Our work is like planting a mustard seed, one of the smallest of seeds, but which grows into a bush big enough for birds to rest in its branches. (*Mark 4.30-32*) In Jesus' ministry, we might say, God's kingly rule was present in a germinal rather than a finished form, and it seems that God waits upon our co-operation in bringing it to its fullness. So, when Jesus was asked when the kingdom of God would come, he replied, 'You cannot tell by observation when the kingdom of God comes. There will be no saying, "Look, here it is!", or "there it is!"; for in fact the kingdom of God is among you.' (*Luke 17.20,21*) In effect he was saying,

you see kingly rule of God in me, and through me you have access to the grace and the power to realise it more fully.

Jesus' teaching, as always, is rooted in the Old Testament – that for him was Holy Scripture. He had been formed by the insights and values it offered, particularly in the the first five books, the Books of the Law, which set out the basis of Israelite society. The scholar T.W. Manson points to a basic difference between the Hebrew understanding of society and that of other cultures. In Athens, he says, a man would be proud of his cultural and political heritage, and property rights and privileges would be jealously guarded. The Israelite's attitude was different. The outstanding feature was an intense awareness of corporate solidarity. The members of a clan or tribe in Israel felt themselves to be part of a single living whole. Compared to Roman law, Hebrew law was much less concerned with rights of property and much more concerned with rights of personality. The basic unit in Hebrew society was not the individual, but the person-in-community.

This concern for the community comes across clearly in the laws and commandments given to Israel by God, and shows clearly the social dimension of faith. Taking the person-in-community as the unit for decision-making places a high value on generosity towards the poor, rights of personality taking precedence over rights of property. So, for example, at harvest time what we would call profit maximisation was forbidden:

When you reap the harvest in your land, do not reap right up to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your crop. Do not completely strip your vineyard, or pick the fallen grapes; leave them for the poor and the alien. *(Leviticus 19.9,10)*

These religious rules go beyond personal charity: justice is to be administered impartially to rich and poor alike; true measures of length, weight and quantity are to be used in the market; and in buying and selling land exploitation of one party by the other is forbidden, a fair price supersedes the market price. All these rules from the Book of Leviticus

form part of the so-called Holiness Code, and make it plain that holiness is not just a matter of saying our prayers but also includes our economic and social relations. What we do in the market place is as much part of our worship as what we do in the holy place.

The Kingdom is about establishing right relationships, or shalom, to use the Hebrew term. We generally translate shalom as 'peace', but this is misleading because our use of the word 'peace' is confused. Generally we use it to mean an absence of conflict; shalom has a deeper meaning; it implies the presence of justice. Peace is not the situation when the fighting stops, but when the enmity that produced the conflict is fully overcome. There is no shalom in the Holy Land just because Israel and Palestine have stopped fighting; shalom will only be present when a just and lasting settlement has been agreed. Shalom requires social justice, and the way the poor are treated is the sign of whether social justice exists. The Biblical stress on communal solidarity does not mean strict equality – differences of wealth and status are accepted in the Bible – but it does mean that the rich accept that the poor are equally members of the same community, and that riches bring an obligation to help the poor. Accepting this obligation is much easier if we see our lives as a whole, as in the Holiness Code, and not divided into sacred and secular parts.

Another way of putting it is to say that shalom, peace in the community, depends on being motivated by the right spirit. Without the right spirit any attempt to live by the laws of God will fail, and this is at the heart of Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom. So, to pray 'Thy kingdom come on earth as in heaven' is to make a choice, to enter into a commitment to be God's agent and instrument in transforming human society. God is not neutral about the way we order things on earth. The whole Bible makes plain God's special concern for the poor, the vulnerable, the stranger and the alien – those who generally rate low in our list of priorities, and for whom shalom is no more than a dream. From the Biblical point of view it is the state of the poorest and those on the edge of society that shows the true state of the nation and not the general level of material wealth. To pray for the kingdom, therefore, is to commit oneself to work for the

transformation of relationships between rich and poor, between citizens and immigrants, between the community and the individual, and between Man and his environment. Julius Nyerere, when President of Tanzania, said that the kingdom does not truly come until it comes for all, and so the Church works not only for the transformation of individuals but also for the transformation of the unjust structures of society.

It is easy to see this simply as political activism wearing the mask of religion, but this would be a mistake. The kingly rule of God has no particular temporal form. Christian Democrats and Christian Socialists have turned out not to be so different from their secular counterparts, and the Holy Roman Empire was not noted for its holiness! The kingdom of God is God's kingly rule, not ours. It is something which God gives, and not something which men build. It is not a Utopia, nor a new social order. His kingly rule with its transformation of relationships transcends all human systems, and in transcending them it judges them. The basic test of the state of the poor, for example, presents an agenda that we must address in building our political systems, but it does not prescribe specific solutions.

The Jubilee 2000 campaign for the remission of the debts of the world's poorest nations was an impressive example of the Church challenging the world with God's agenda, and the limited results so far obtained show just how hard the task is – but they also show how worthwhile it is. In Uganda, for example, the remission of debts has released funds that enable thousands of children to have access to education and health care that were formerly denied. But working for the kingdom does not have to be high profile and on that scale. In Ely Cathedral a few years ago we had an exhibition of paintings from St John's Church, Hackney in east London, with which we are twinned. Some years ago St John's decided to do more than to give tea and sympathy to the many needy and disturbed people who sought help, and a project was set up to teach them practical and artistic skills. One of the artists, with a history of depression, explained to me how working at the project was healing as well as

providing new skills. This is transforming work, a sign of the kingly rule of God.

Another transformation that is still bearing fruit was begun over fifteen centuries ago by a monk called Benedict. His desire was to enable men to live in community and to seek God together. From his modest 'school of the Lord's service', as he called it, grew the worldwide Benedictine movement which was instrumental in preserving the religion and culture of Europe during the Dark Ages – so much so that Pope Paul VI named him the patron saint of Europe. The Benedictines also had a profound influence in agriculture, education and health care. The Rule that St Benedict wrote to regulate the life of his monastery still speaks across the centuries about the kind of people we need to be, and how we need to relate together to achieve a common goal. Today businesses are finding in the Rule a model for combining personal development, effective leadership and team-working skills. Benedict is not widely known, even in the Church. His is an example of the seed growing secretly, of man co-operating with God, and the result is a harvest exceeding all expectations as relationships are transformed by the kingly rule of God.

## II A Moral Society

*Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight.*

*(Proverbs 9.6)*

It is a pity that the wisdom literature of the Bible – Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs – is more or less unknown. It presents a contrasting view to other the books of Old Testament. You will not find in the wisdom writings stories of battles, the doings of kings, or the warnings of the prophets. The authors of these books are not concerned with actual events, but with the insight and discernment that enables

those events to be evaluated and put in context. Wisdom affirms that there is a divinely sustained cosmic order behind the events of human experience, and its purpose is to help us to live through them; it gives us something enduring to hold on to.

We stand in sore need of wisdom today. In one week in 2000 the news stories included the advent of human cloning; the continuing fallout from the News of the World's naming and shaming campaign against paedophiles; the fact that we have the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Europe; and Nasty Nick being thrown out by Big Brother. It is a picture of a disordered world, of moral confusion. In many of our moral dilemmas we are the victims of our own cleverness. The increase in knowledge in modern times is phenomenal but it has occurred at precisely the time when we have lost the shared moral sense which allows us to evaluate it and use it aright. E.F. Schumacher, put the point well; in *Small is Beautiful* he said, 'we have become too clever to be able to live without wisdom.' We prize cleverness when what we need is wisdom; we amass information when what we need is insight. The problem has been compounded by the Internet. It has brought about an undreamed-of access to information – so much so that we are overwhelmed with information and choice – but it offers no guidance on how to discriminate between the good and the bad, the useful and the destructive. It is all about information; it offers nothing about insight. It is not surprising that the Internet has been described as both anarchic and subversive.

In *The Politics of Hope* Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi, addresses the problem of the loss of a shared moral sense and considers how it might be regained. He argues that we need to learn again the skill of moral argument in public, and to recover the will to place constraints on what we can do but which in the long run will not be to the common good. The environment is an obvious example. Exploiting it brings immediate economic benefits, but only at the expense of the survival of the planet. To lay aside immaturity and walk in the way of insight we need to re-build a moral society.

A moral society can only be built from within. Today, by contrast we tend to rely on external controls. Whenever something goes wrong we set up a procedure or a system to ensure that it will never happen again. Such systems have their place, but they are not a lasting solution, and in the case of the massive corporate fraud reported at Enron and Worldcom the system – the auditors whose job was to prevent fraud – were part of the problem: they simply did not do their job properly. In the end external controls never work because they do not challenge or change the assumptions or values that lie at the heart of the problem. The answer can only be in terms of a new spirit, the strengthening of internal controls. President Bush said as much in his response to the Worldcom scandal: ‘Corporate America has to recognise that there’s a higher calling than trying to fudge the numbers.’ Controlling the Internet is another example. Sites can be closed down, and laws can attempt to regulate content, but it is virtually impossible to police; if there are to be effective controls over its use they will have to come from within, from a shared sense of what is morally acceptable.

The problem is not new. Norman Davies in his history of Europe describes the decline of the Roman Empire, a process of inner decay, of moral laziness and corruption. It was a long process stretching over many centuries, and those who lived through it would have been unaware that it was happening. The parallel with today is clear. Jonathan Sacks shows how the present moral laziness began in the seventeenth century; over the years most people have not been aware of what was happening, and today many rejoice in the absence of moral constraints, a situation powerfully supported by modern economics. The result is that the Christian virtues which have shaped our European society over the centuries are being abandoned in favour of a culture of consumption and individual choice. Morality has been privatised; all moral choices are accepted as equally valid. We have abandoned the wisdom of the ages precisely at the time when we have become too clever to be able to live without it.

This process of inner decay is described by Rose Macaulay in her final novel, *The Towers of Trebizond*. Laurie used to go to church, but describes herself as 'somewhat lapsed'. Part of the reason for her lapsed state is that for ten years she had been having an affair with her cousin Vere, a married man. She knows this is wrong, she even admits that she is stealing his love from his wife and family, but she doesn't end the affair. Instead she rationalises her position: Vere had fallen out of love with his wife, and if she hadn't yielded to him he would have found someone else. Vere does not share even her lapsed faith, and mocks what he calls her 'Church obsession'. Caught in these confused loyalties, Laurie chooses Vere and lets go of God. At the end of the book, after Vere has been killed in a car accident for which Laurie was responsible, she finds herself unable to return to the Church.

'I did not feel that I could. Even the desire for it was killed. I was debarred from it less by guilt, and by what seemed to me the cheap meanness of creeping back now that the way was clear, than by revulsion from something that would divide me further from Vere. It had always tried to divide us; at the beginning, it had nearly succeeded. To turn to it now would be a gesture against the past which we had shared, and in whose bonds I was still held.'

She recalls the words of a priest who had said to her that

'if one went on refusing to hear and obey one's conscience for long enough, it became stultified and died; one stopped believing in right and wrong and in God, and all that side of life became blurred in a fog: one would not want it any more.'

Laurie says, 'I had got to that stage now; I wanted nothing of it, for even to think of it hurt.'

Perhaps her story helps us to understand St Paul's plea: 'Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions.' We tend to think of sin in terms of individual acts or omissions:

doing wrong, like committing adultery, or failing to do right, like failing to help someone in need. These are indeed sins, but if we focus just on them we fail to think of sin in all its terror. Sin is a state, and its passions are unmerciful and all-consuming; as St Paul says, the wages of sin is death...’ Sin is the state in which Laurie finds herself because for too long she has ignored her conscience and desired the wrong. She is separated from God. Laurie has built around her her own private hell. The awful tragedy is that this state is self-made. As is often said, the gates of hell are bolted on the inside.

The permissive society of the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century made talking about sin seem out of touch, and the plural society which followed has further eroded our capacity for moral judgement. Frank Sinatra’s song *My Way* summed up the spirit of those years: doing your own thing, rejecting moral rules. Like Laurie we made a gradual, willed retreat from God, and as Laurie discovered, the sense of right and wrong has all become blurred in a fog. And having sown the wind we are now reaping the whirlwind.

It is easy to diagnose the problem; it is less east to say what needs to be done. How do you get wisdom? *Proverbs* describes wisdom in familiar images: ‘Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars ... spiced her wine, and spread her table.’ A house, a feast, good wine: wisdom, unlike information, cannot be looked up in a book it can only be built like a house, savoured, experienced, tasted like good food and wine. The getting of wisdom takes time and it needs the company of others. Wisdom is communal not individual; it is not a matter of personal choice, a lifestyle option, but something acquired from the society in which we live. Our problem is not that we lack moral concern – moral concern dominates the news: environmental pollution, child protection, Third World Debt, GM crops, the war on terror – even on *Big Brother* the contestants are expected to behave with honesty. What we lack is not moral concern but moral society, the collective sense that unless we place some limits on personal choice, that is, on the way we use our cleverness, we shall lose all that we have gained.

Jonathan Sacks argues convincingly for the re-building of a moral society. He believes we have the resources, and that we have done it before in the fight against slave trade and against the exploitation of children following the industrial revolution. What characterised these campaigns was people coming together in local societies and groups, not as vigilantes but as agents of responsible change. The hallmark of a moral society is the willingness of ordinary people to get involved. *Big Brother* is the sign of a society that has become morally lazy: we are content to be spectators but not to be involved, like Romans at the Games watching the gladiators kill each other. The French call such people *voyeurs*; voyeurism is a sickness of the spirit

The fight against slavery and the exploitation of children was led by Christians like William Wilberforce and Charles Dickens. They formed groups and societies through which they rebuilt the moral society of their day. A similar effort is required today, and we Christians have huge resources to bring to such an endeavour. To do it we need to recover our self-confidence and widen our concern from the personal to the communal, from individual salvation to building the Kingdom. When Israel stood on the edge of the promised land Moses called the people to observe the laws which he had taught them and make them known to their children and grandchildren. Those laws were directed to the common good, and ensured that public and private morality went hand-in-hand. This was so remarkable that Moses assured the people that when the other nations heard their laws they would say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people.'

In the Law of Moses there are well over six hundred commandments covering criminal offences, agriculture, personal injury, family life, trade, finance, and Temple ritual. Reading them, it is clear that all the laws are of equal importance; no difference is made between the market place and the holy place, between sacred and secular; all the laws are equally part of worship. A particular value is placed on the community, and there is a compassionate concern for the vulnerable, and those on the edges of society – orphans, widows and aliens – because they are God's special

concern. Israel is to show this special concern because God had mercy on them when they were aliens in a foreign land. In contrast to the other nations Israel was a moral society; her laws acknowledged that God was the Lord of all life, they promoted community and were interpreted in a spirit of generosity, and that must be a strong reason why her civilisation survived and the others did not.

This special concern for the poor has characterised the Church in South America, and it was his adoption of this concern that led to the murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador. As Romero became aware of the plight of the people of his diocese he began to take seriously the teaching of the Second Vatican Council about God's preferential option for the poor. This was a new departure in Church teaching, and not without its opponents. Latin America was fertile ground in which to plant this new teaching. At the time of Romero's appointment the regional gross domestic product per capita was \$1,435 compared with \$9,546 for the industrialised world. Although this was much better than the figure for Africa, Latin America was scarred by a social and economic inequality more extreme than almost anywhere else in the world; even in 1990 one quarter of the whole South American population subsisted on less than \$1 a day. As Edward Stourton has said, to talk about sin in Europe meant sex, in Latin America it meant poverty. A Euro-centric Church simply did not understand – or if it did, it was not willing to let its teachings really alter its practice, and convert from being a Church of the haves to a Church of the have-nots. Jon Sobrino, a colleague of Romero, summed up the view from Latin America thus: '...the world is not just a planet with typical European problems like secularisation and agnosticism. It is a planet of poverty where the main issue for human beings is to live and survive. ...[T]he problem in the world is not, as they say in Europe or the United States, that there are pockets of poverty: in the world there are pockets of abundance, and the rest is poverty.'

As Romero knew, the option for the poor is a clear Biblical imperative. It is not possible to read the Old Testament without being struck by God's special concern for the poor and the outcast. Typical are the rules in

Leviticus prohibiting reaping right up to the edges of the field, or gathering the gleanings and fallen fruit; these were to be left for the poor and the alien. (*Lev 19.9&10*) In later centuries the prophets inveighed against Israel precisely because these laws of economic generosity had been ignored. Amos is eloquent and damning in his condemnation of those who cared only for their own comfort, oppressing the helpless and indifferent to the fate of the poor, levying taxes, extorting tribute, and using fraudulent practices in the market. (*Amos 4.1; 5.11&12; 8.4-6*) Romero insisted that these rules were not just guidelines for private charity, but the foundation of a just economic system. He was right. From a Biblical perspective the justice of an economic system is not determined by the general level of wealth, but by the condition of the poorest. Fundamentally Romero's struggle was not with the repressive regime in power in El Salvador, but with an economic system which legitimises gross disparities of wealth.

St Paul saw the battle in which Christians are engaged as one against the principalities and powers, the spiritual forces of evil. (*Colossians 2.6 – 23*) In his day that meant taking a strong stand on issues of personal morality, especially sexual morality. While personal and sexual ethics still pose huge problems, I believe that the principalities and powers today present themselves chiefly in an economic disguise and the more urgent task is to reconnect economics with ethics. Most, if not all, of the problems we face are economic in nature or are affected by economic thinking. The environment, health care, family life, biotechnology, armaments, for example, are all affected by economic forces. I believe that the church has more to offer to the economic debate than is commonly appreciated, and since Romero's death it has mounted a biting and effective critique of the moral basis of modern economics.

The basis of this critique is the social teaching of the Church, a teaching which is largely unknown. Much of it has been developed by the Catholic Church, but there is a very considerable degree of ecumenical agreement. Modern economic theory is founded on the belief that happiness comes through increasing consumption, and that the goal of society should be

increasing material prosperity. The individual is central and the governing assumption is that human behaviour rests on the rational pursuit of self-interest. The economic view is far removed from the Christian view which insists that the common good is central and equates love of neighbour with love of self. Economics has come to occupy such a central place in modern life – it provides the language and analytical tools through which modern problems, personal, social and commercial, are discussed and solutions sought – that we have become blind to the fact that it offers a limited view of society. The economic model is much more restricted than the underlying social model which acknowledges the ties of love and community and the need for solidarity between the rich and the poor. People are more than individual economic agents, and yet it is the economic model that dominates, and in the rational calculation of self-interest love grows cold. Here is structural sin staring us in the face.

We have become blind also to the fact that, in the end, economic theory rests not on hard data, as in the physical sciences, but on a series of assumptions about what makes for human happiness and the ends towards which society should be directed. Economics is not so much a science as a secular religion, and its central institution, the market, works in the interests of its chief worshippers, those with wealth and power; in the market the poor are powerless. In place of the option for the poor, modern economics provides an option for the rich.

The Christian view derives clearly from the laws given to Moses as Israel entered the promised land. Israelite society was based on the concept of the person-in-community, and this guarded Israel against the twin evils of unrestrained individualism and despotic collectivism. Starting with this concept, the Church has developed the doctrine of the common good, and has been sharply critical of the moral foundation of modern economics. For example, in their booklet *The Common Good*, issued before the 1997 election, the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales insisted that the common good was incompatible with allowing the distribution of wealth to be determined solely by market forces, and that the search for profit must not be allowed to override all other moral

considerations. To do so, they said, reduced people 'to the status of isolated economic agents, whose life has meaning only as a consumer.'

The Christian insistence that life is more than consumption, and that the condition of the poorest is the basic criterion of an economic system has been used to great effect. When Christian Aid ran its campaign 'Who Runs The World', criticising the policies of the World Bank, its Director was invited to Washington to discuss the issues involved. Similarly when the Church of Scotland sent a Christian critique of the economic model used by the EU to Brussels, the authors were invited to meet the European Commission to explain further the value base which underlay their work. And most impressive is the way in which the Jubilee 2000 Coalition has brought the issue of Third World Debt to the top of the agenda. We Christians have much to contribute to the process of re-connecting economics with ethics, and we punch well above our weight!

Jesus' most stinging criticism of the Pharisees was that they had let human tradition over-ride the commandments of God. (*Matthew 15.1-9*) As God said through Isaiah, 'This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as false doctrines.' This is precisely our present situation; market economics offers us false and seductive doctrines. Maybe its most insidious achievement is to have legitimised greed. If the way of wisdom is to be regained through public moral debate, as Jonathan Sacks argues, economic theory is the prime arena for that debate. Perhaps the most important resource that we bring to the debate is the conviction that a moral society cannot be built without God; as the psalmist said, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Wisdom is timeless; it is outside of ourselves; it is something given. We believe that Jesus is the wisdom of God personified. We who dwell in his house, who are fed at his banquet, have much to contribute to the rebuilding of a moral society. Can it be done? I am not optimistic, but I am hopeful. Optimism believes that everything will all work out for the best. Hope accepts that it may not, but even so believes that there are possibilities of good worth striving for. Hope is the belief that our resources are equal to our challenges, and the

determination to use the one to address the other; today God calls his Church to be the agent of hope.

### III The Pursuit of Happiness

In 1776 the pursuit of happiness was declared to be one the inalienable rights of man. The opening words of the American Declaration of Independence are well known:

‘We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.’

Today the pursuit of happiness has moved to the top of the political agenda, at least in the Conservative Party. David Cameron, in a recent speech, said, ‘It’s time we admitted there’s more to life than money, and it’s time we focussed not just on GDP [gross domestic product], but GWB – general well-being.’ In the same vein there was an item on the news some weeks ago reporting that although the general level of wealth had risen, people did not feel that their happiness had also increased. It would be true, but perhaps not helpful, to remind Mr Cameron and other politicians – left, right and centre – that the Church has been saying this for years, indeed for centuries. Even so, it is important to point out that if policies are to be developed to increase general well being, they cannot ignore the spiritual aspect of human nature. For too long political debate in this country has been conducted as though people have no soul.

The soullessness of British society was underlined by a Church of England report, *Faithful Cities*, published in the same week as David

Cameron made his speech. It pointed, among other things, to the high level of depression among young people in Britain. They are the most depressed in Europe, and feelings of depression are widespread even among those who are materially well off. Commenting on both the report and Mr Cameron's speech *The Tablet* said: 'the moral of both ... is that a country devoted to the pursuit of material possessions will not find happiness.' The Church may have been saying this for centuries; the Bible has said it for millennia. Most chillingly, in Psalm 106 we read: 'He gave them over to their desires, and sent leanness withal into their hearts.' That is not just an assessment of the state of the people of Israel in the fifth century BC, but the statement of a universal moral rule. If we put ourselves at the centre of our lives, and make satisfying our desires our over-riding aim, we shall be diminished as people; our hearts will become lean.

Happiness is not really a Biblical concept. 'Happy' occurs only 18 times in the Old Testament, and only 6 times in the New Testament, and only one of those is a saying of Jesus; modern translations prefer instead the word 'blessed'. In the Bible happiness is always linked with doing the will of God. So Israel can be happy because the Lord is her God (*Psalms 144.15*), and 'happy is the man who finds wisdom and understanding and trusts in the Lord' (*Proverbs 3.13; 16.20*). Happiness and blessedness are synonymous; they are about flourishing, fulfilment, and spiritual growth, and this comes from doing the will of God. Referring to this teaching, Jesus says, 'If you know these things blessed are you if you do them.' (*John 13.17*). Happiness is not the same as contentment; it is a spiritual state, not a material state. As Jesus said, 'What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and forfeit his life?' (*Mark 8.36*) We have gained the whole world, even to the extent that we can change its climate, but we are not happy; our hearts are lean.

Becoming full-hearted, and therefore happier, is a spiritual goal not an economic goal, and the way to it is the way of self-denial not self-indulgence. Again, Jesus put it graphically: 'Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will

save it.' (*Mark 8.35*) It is almost impossible for us to hear those words, let alone to let them weigh with us, in today's materialistic culture. For so long we have been persuaded that the way to happiness is through acquisition, increasing our wealth and possessions, that the idea of self-denial must seem bizarre, if not complete nonsense. One sign of the hold that acquisitiveness has got over us is the many invitations to take out a loan that come through our letter-boxes. In 2005 I kept those I received. The total was 29 – just over one every two weeks. These invitations are seductively marketed as the way to happiness; they are in fact the way to bondage.

I don't know whether David Cameron believes we should de-throne our self and our desires and remove them from the centre of concern, but I hope he does. Elsewhere in his speech he said, 'well being can't be measured by money or traded in markets. Its about the beauty of our surroundings, the quality of our culture, and above all the strength of our relationships.' It is significant that these three examples are all about things we have in common: our environment, our culture and our relationships. These are common possessions, and unless we value them and protect them together they wither and die. Our failure to do so is seen in environmental degradation, cultural dumbing-down and the fragility of personal relationships. Happiness also is a common possession before it is an individual possession. We are not happy because we have neglected the things that give us a common sense of identity and purpose. Perhaps at its heart global warming is a sign to us that we have failed to value our common possessions on which life depends. We have wantonly exploited them rather than conserved them, following the way of self-satisfaction instead of the way of self-denial.

Perhaps we can see that self-denial makes sense, but somehow we lack the strength to make it a life-style choice. The spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak. And self-denial does not seem to make much sense if the vast majority continue to follow the way of self-satisfaction. Political action is necessary, and that is why David Cameron's speech is to be welcomed. But political action will never be enough. Self-denial requires a

religious, or spiritual motivation; nothing else has the necessary transforming power. (Ironically, the Protestant work ethic, of which David Cameron was critical, originally provided that power, because it was an ethic of self-denial. For the Puritan entrepreneurs, indulging themselves through the fruits of their industry was sinful, and it was this ethic rather than the ethic of consumption that gave rise to modern capitalism. We should be returning to it rather than abandoning it as Cameron suggested.)

Self-denial includes valuing our common possessions, and this is essentially a work of love; an endeavour that reaches out beyond the self; a concern that takes other people's interests seriously and lets them set the agenda rather than our own wants and desires. If we want to see what this love looks like we need look no further than Jesus. His whole ministry and teaching was about overcoming self-concern and letting the will of God be central in our lives. What God offered us in Jesus is not a rule-book, nor a philosophy of life, but a relationship. It is by being true to that relationship that we find our true selves, receive the strength to deny ourselves for the sake of others, and come to eternal life – in a word, to happiness.

So perhaps the Declaration of Independence does not get it quite right when it talks of happiness as something to be pursued, something that can be acquired by individual effort. Happiness is not the same as the pursuit of individual pleasure, rather it is a gift that God pours upon us when we seek to do his will. David Cameron is nearer the mark when he talks of valuing our common possessions, but for his vision of greater well being to be realised, political debate will have to be more about moral and spiritual aspirations and less about economic management. In other words, the politics of individual choice will have to be replaced by the politics of the common good.

# LEARNING FROM TERROR

## I A Word from the Lord?

*Thus says the Lord, the God of hosts: alas for those who are at ease in Zion, and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria!*

AMOS 6.1

The words of the prophet Amos echoed through Israel in the eighth century BC. Amos was responding to the threat against Israel from Assyria, and he spoke out of the tradition which saw the hand of God in historical events. The Greeks had a word for it; they called these times *kairos*, significant times: times of judgement, or of destiny. The prophets said to their people, beware of these times, for those who missed this dimension in the events unfolding around them, missed the true meaning of what was going on. Amos warned that Israel would miss the true meaning of the Assyrian threat if they saw it simply in political terms. To understand correctly what was going on, they had to see the hand of God in the disaster – which did indeed overtake them. God was using the Assyrians to punish his people for turning away from his ways. Amos' words went unheeded, and two hundred years later history repeated itself, in perhaps the greatest disaster to beset ancient Israel. In the sixth century BC Babylon conquered Israel and deported all but the poorest of its citizens. Another prophet, Jeremiah, interpreted this disaster in the same way. Like Amos before him, he had no doubt that the hand of God was present in the event; again he was punishing Israel for her faithlessness.

I have had this prophetic understanding much in mind since the events of September 11th., and also the events of ten or eleven years ago when the Gulf War was upon us. Then the aggression by Iraq brought to mind the great Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar (Babylon was, of course, the predecessor of modern Iraq), who showed, if anything, less human

feeling and less moral scruple than his modern successor Saddam Hussein, or indeed, those who now wreak terror by flying aircraft into buildings. The brutality and the suffering inflicted by Nebuchadnezzar's army was appalling. The conquest of Israel first by the Assyrians and then by the Babylonians was the background against which the prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke – and looked at in the light of contemporary events the prophetic view is disturbing if not shocking. Not only did they see the hand of God in the suffering inflicted upon Israel, they went further and said God was acting through a tyrant like Nebuchadnezzar to bring judgement upon his people. This view did not cut much ice at the time, but it is the view that has been preserved, and preserved as Holy Scripture no less! And that ought to make us think.

Coming to terms with brutal, capricious evil has never been easy for Christians who believe in a loving God. It is often easier to agree with Freud that dark, unfeeling and unloving powers determine human destiny. But it is also easy to overlook the fact that Jesus is shown in the Gospels to be in a constant battle against just these forces of darkness. The good news is, of course, that he overcame them. While it is important and right to fight against evil and to punish those who wreak acts of terror (although I think the present campaign should be described as bringing criminals to justice rather than waging war against terror), it is also important to remember that God's overcoming was wrought through the cross and not through the force of arms. If God is in this conflict, we are unlikely to find him in either of the opposing sides, or their ideologies.

So, where are we to find God in these events? It is in answering this question that I find the prophetic view helpful. While I do not think we can say God is using Osama bin Laden in a direct way, like Jeremiah believed he was using Nebuchadnezzar – such a God would not be consistent with the way he revealed himself in Jesus – I do think he uses them in the sense that he expects us to see in the circumstances in which they arose the error of our ways. And there are many modern-day prophets, in the unexpected but familiar guise of journalists and political commentators, whose message points the same way. They direct our

attention to the factors which provide fertile ground for terror, factors that have a clear Biblical pedigree.

The first is the Biblical imperative that there is no peace without justice – and in this context it is social justice to which the Bible refers. It was because of their contempt of the poor that Amos inveighed against those who sat at ease in Zion. Conor Gearty, Professor of Human Rights Law at King’s College London, writing in *The Tablet* (22.9.01), said ‘The world economic system seems to many designed to perpetuate Western power, and to close off all hope of progress for the many. The liberal society may be the heaven on earth that the West says it is, but why should the rest of the world suffer a permanent purgatory or hell to keep the paradise perfect. No wonder there are millions trying to scale its walls.’ Isn’t this precisely the message which the Church has proclaimed for the last few years through the Jubilee 2000 campaign? In the West we have developed a greedy lifestyle based on increasing consumption, and on the assumption that energy will always be available in the quantities that we require. This greedy lifestyle can only be maintained by condemning millions to poverty. How, I wonder, do the poor feel when this is defended as ‘the American way of life’? In the end violence is the only option left to the poor. But this is not all, because the West adds insult to injury, as Conor Gearty points out: ‘Most inflammatory of all is the way the West seeks not just of the monopoly of the world’s resources but also of its morality. We are not only rich but good as well, respecters of freedom and human rights, quite unlike the savage rabble outside. When we kill it is counter-terrorism; when they do, it is mindless violence’. As another commentator said, one lesson we shall have to learn is the danger of underestimating the rage of the wretched on earth. The Bible is clear that the poor are God’s special concern, and that means that they should be our special concern. But we refuse to face it. So God makes us face it.

At the beginning of the present conflict, Matt Fry reporting from Jerusalem, said ‘The seeds of the conflict are in this city, and this is where the solution will have to be found.’ There is, I think, a very large measure of agreement that this is true. The plight of the Palestinians is a constant

reminder to the Muslim world, and indeed to many Christians, of the West's unconcern for justice. Conor Gearty again: 'It is the funerals of the Palestinian victims that are noticed across the Islamic world while we in the West play and replay the images of the terrorist attacks, wondering why they happened'. I find it predictable but sickening that it is only when the stability of the West is seriously threatened that pressure is really placed upon Israel to accord basic human rights and dignity to the Palestinian people, some of whom are its own citizens, and all of whom have shared the land since recorded history began. The parable of Dives and Lazarus (*Luke 18.19-31*) is a chilling warning to those who ignore the needs of the poor and the dispossessed. In telling this parable Jesus reminds us that the way the rich treat the poor is not just a matter of justice; it is a matter of our eternal salvation. We in the West choose not to hear this. We refuse to face it. So God makes us face it.

In the ten years since 1991 it has become clearer that it is not simply justice in the distribution of economic resources that needs addressing, there is also the difficulty we have in the West of respecting different cultures. The present terrorists are not poor people. We have all been told that these are educated men: they have been to College; they have learnt to fly aeroplanes; they are able to live the sort of lifestyle that we generally aspire to. It is not only the plight of the poor that is driving these men, it is also the cultural domination which the West is inflicting upon the rest of the world. Some years ago the historian John Roberts made a television series called *The Triumph of the West*. He traced how, over the centuries, Western ideas and Western culture had gradually been exported to the rest of the world. We know a little of what this is like in our British resistance to the encroachment of American ideas and culture, but we tend to overlook the way we have exported, often through force of arms, our own culture to much of the world. In *The Dignity of Difference* Jonathan Sacks protests on behalf of the Jewish people about the way in which Western culture is being forced, largely through economic means, on the rest of the world. We can hardly be surprised if they do not like it.

Scott Thomas, an American who lectures on international relations at the University of Bath, commenting on this in the *Church Times* (28.9.01), wrote: 'The cause of the resentment is the rise of the West and the decline of Islam since the 16th century. Economic development will not resolve this problem. The West has to come to terms with the resurgence of Islam as a force in world politics.' A crucial part of that 'coming to terms' is understanding the role of religion in Islamic society. As Scott Thomas points out, this is also part of the debate within Islam:

'What is at issue is not a clash between civilisations – Islam and the West – but rather a clash within Islamic civilisation on the relationship between Islam and modernity. In the West we have come to regard religion as a set of privately held beliefs that do not have much bearing on the technological and economic forces in society. But not all societies share, or even wish to share that view, and the failure of the West to understand this exacerbates the present problem. What many in the Islamic world wish to safeguard – not just the fanatics – is the definition of religion as a community of believers rather than a privatised body of beliefs, the sacred notion of a community defined by religion.'

It was precisely Israel's failure to safeguard this sacred notion (in the way that God wished it to be safeguarded) that led to the judgements pronounced by Amos and Jeremiah. And it is just this principle – that the insights of religion should inform the nature of our society, its ethics, its economics and its use of technology – that we in the so-called Christian West have largely abandoned. But God will not let us abandon it, so he makes us face it.

Just as in the days of Amos and Jeremiah, God is present in this crisis, and is present in judgement. We may have difficulty in acknowledging this because it is not the way we want to look at God, especially when things are in a mess. We would much prefer him somehow to sort things out, like a parent separating quarrelling children. But God is not like that

and never has been. There were times when Israel thought of him in this way, as their national champion, but the Bible witnesses to the abandoning of this view over the centuries in the light of history. God is a saviour, he is not a champion or a fixer, and his salvation involves judgement. The better biblical view is that God becomes judge at every crisis in history.

But God's judgement is not directed to condemnation and punishment, but to repentance. We need to see the present crisis not simply in economic or political terms but in spiritual terms. As Michael Nazir-Ali, the Bishop of Rochester, has pointed out, too much of our national policy has been based on materialistic assumptions at the expense of cultural and ethical factors. 'This has now proved to be narrow-minded and dangerous; technical training, for example, must take account of the uses to which science may be put, whether it be terrorism, internal repression or exploitation of the poor.' (*Church Times* 5.10.01) We Christians need to think seriously about how we deal with other cultures and religions and not treat them as subject peoples. We need to lend our voices to those who argue that dialogue between cultures will only be fruitful if it is undergirded by dialogue between religions. For it is religious differences which underlie so much of culture, politics and economics, and as Hans Kung has said, there will be no peace between the nations until there is peace between the faiths.

Those who perpetuate terrorism are evil and brutal; but they have power over us largely because of our greed and stupidity and short-sightedness. Osama Bin Laden may be captured, tried and executed. He will pass away. But other evils will follow, and we shall continue to have grief until we return to God 'who judges the world with righteousness and the people with his truth.'

## II A Just War?

The morality of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 continues to be a contentious issue, particularly as all the original grounds for the invasion have proved baseless (the possession of weapons of mass destruction and links with al Qaeda, for example), and the aftermath is nothing less than an unmitigated disaster. But even before the invasion major reservations were being felt, not least by those who would be part of the invasion force. In January 2003 my fellow Canon, John Inge, was talking to a soldier who was on 24 hours standby for deployment in Iraq. Her arm ached from the inoculations he had received, and her heart ached with doubts. Privately, she was unsure of the rightness of the mission on which she was about to be sent. Was it a moral mission?

The answer depends on whether the war would be just. Just war theory began in Greece as a means of determining when it was right for a city to go to war against another city, but in its modern form it is largely a Christian creation. The concept of a just war is part of the common inheritance of civilised states; it is founded on the conviction that we are moral people, that states are not above the moral law, and that when violent action is contemplated the morality of that action must be established. The just war principles have been variously stated, and fall into two categories: *jus ad bellum*, the rules governing the decision to go to war, and *jus in bello*, the rules governing the conduct of hostilities. It is the principles of the first category that concern the decision to invade; those of the second category were later invoked in response to the atrocities of Abu Ghraib and other similar acts of wrongdoing. *Jus ad bellum* has three basic principles: the war must be waged by a proper authority; for a just cause; and with a reasonable prospect of establishing good or of overcoming evil. To these two other principles are generally added: war must be the last resort; and the action proposed must be proportional to the circumstances.

Most of the argument at the time of the invasion was about proper authority, but there were other concerns. For example, was war at that time really the course of last resort? The sanctions regime, although somewhat eroded was still effective; it could have been re-invigorated and coupled with financial assistance to those who had their trade links with Iraq disrupted. Against this there were those who argued that faced with the threat of the use of weapons of mass destruction, military action could be the response of last resort if it seemed to be the only way to deal with it. On this view there is no need to try the alternatives; it depends on a theoretical assessment of their likely effectiveness. But as Richard Harries, the Bishop of Oxford, said, this stretches the concept of last resort beyond the point where it has any real meaning. Whether military action is a step of last resort can only properly be established if all other means have in fact been tried and have failed (*The Tablet* 18.1.03).

There was also concern about establishing good or overcoming evil. Not that anyone doubted that Saddam Hussein was an evil man, and that ridding the Iraqis of him was a good objective. The problem was, if his overthrow was a legitimate target, then where did you draw the line? There are other rulers whose overthrow would be a good thing, Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, for example. And if Saddam Hussein was overthrown, then how would we build a better and lasting regime? The experience of military intervention in Somalia, Kosovo and Afghanistan was hardly encouraging. Referring to this, the Bishops of the Church of England, in their *Evaluation of the Threat of Military Action Against Iraq*, said: 'until greater clarity exists as to the nature of the peace for which the war will be fought, then the present policy of containment might be preferable to the risks and uncertainty of military action.' In the light of subsequent events these were indeed prophetic words. Part of the calculation of good and evil was the effect of the war on Christian/Muslim and Western/Arab relations. Hosni Mubarak, the President of Egypt, said: 'If you strike at the Iraqi people because of one or two individuals and leave the Palestinian issue unsolved, not a single Arab ruler will be able to curb the popular sentiments. We fear a state of

disorder and chaos may prevail in the region.’ Again, prophetic words that went unheeded.

If these points were not enough, there was the overriding issue of proper authority. The need for proper authority was originally designed to ensure that war was waged by a state and not by private armies, war lords or vigilantes. But the scale and horror of modern warfare and the desire to establish some sort of worldwide political authority to restrain the breakout of regional conflicts, has brought a change of emphasis. Proper authority in a situation like the invasion of Iraq now means international authority. The US National Security Strategy, developed by the Bush administration after ‘9/11’ was a serious challenge to this view. The new strategy sought to justify pre-emptive action against states perceived as presenting a threat to American interests or to world peace not by the international community, but, if necessary, by the USA acting unilaterally or in conjunction with a ‘coalition of the willing.’ Against this it was argued that the United Nations is the proper authority. While it is true that the US government did try to obtain UN authorisation, and there was much debate about whether a ‘second resolution’ was necessary, they always maintained the right to act unilaterally. The central point about the Christian understanding of proper authority is that it should be the highest authority available. As the Bishop of London said at the time:

One of the conditions of stability in the modern world is predictability. Is it imperative that we have an international process to judge which instances ... demand the intervention of outside powers. No state, however powerful, should be left as judge and jury. There is only one institution remotely capable of helping to form such judgements and that is the United Nations.

*(House of Lords, 24.12.02)*

Earlier, George Weigel, an American ethical and political theorist had sought to justify the New National Security doctrine. He argued that in some circumstances it was not necessary to wait until the enemy attacked.

If the enemy is like Iraq then 'going first' may be 'morally obligatory'. 'Can we not say that, in the hands of certain kinds of states, their mere possession of weapons of mass destruction constitutes an aggression – or, at the very least, an aggression-waiting-to-happen? The 'regime factor' is crucial in the moral analysis.' (*Moral Clarity in a Time of War*) There might be a point here if the evidence of imminent attack was clear and undisputed, but that was not the case at the time, and Weigel's argument sounds like an attempt to give moral justification to a decision already taken on other grounds, namely the establishment of a regime favourable to American neo-conservative interests. In response Richard Harries said:

This is a highly dangerous idea, not least because the United States is in possession of more weapons of mass destruction than any other country. Americans see some of those other countries as potential aggressors, and conclude that this justifies pre-emptive war against them. But by the same reasoning, those countries, if they for their part see the United States as a potential aggressor, would be justified in taking pre-emptive action against it. In making this point, I do not, of course, imply that there is a moral equivalence between a democratic country like the United States and a dictatorship like Iraq. But I do say Weigel's view opens a Pandora's box. (*The Tablet* 18.1.03)

Indeed; and it would require only a small extension to Weigel's argument to use it to justify Hezbollah's attack against Israel which was widely condemned, and which led to the latest fighting in south Lebanon. Hezbollah is not, of course a state *de jure*, but acts like one *de facto*; a nice distinction that is easily glossed over.

Weighing all these arguments it seemed at the time that the soldier who came to the Cathedral that January morning was not about to be sent on a moral mission, because that mission would not be just. It gives no satisfaction whatsoever to note that subsequent events have proved that judgement correct. The tragedy of the whole episode is not only the huge

loss of life, the destruction of infrastructure, the collapse of civil authority, the looting and destruction of priceless treasure from Iraq's museums, and a nation on the verge of civil war, but also, as the Church of England bishops said, that the moral, political and legal threshold for war has been substantially lowered.

### III Islam and the State

David Goldberg is a rabbi. Recently he gave a series of lectures on Judaism at a Muslim college for the training of imams. At the end he had what he described as a no-holds-barred question-and-answer session. Writing about it in *The Independent's* 'Faith and Reason' column (26.4.03), he pointed to a fundamental difference between the way the liberal democracies of the West and Islam view the state. He asked the students where they would prefer to live:

'in a secular Western-style democracy where religion is a private choice, or in a theocratic state governed by the sharia [the Muslim law]? Without exception, they all opted for a sharia state, because, they said, as the revealed will of God the sharia contains legislation not only for minute particulars such as personal hygiene or the times of prayer, but also for every aspect of wise government. Their confidence in the all-embracing efficacy of the sharia highlighted one crucial difference between Western and Islamic notions of the nation state. Broadly speaking, we in the West subscribe to government by secular law and the separation of church and state.... Islamic jurisprudence, in contrast, does not endorse secular jurisdiction as a genuine source of law. Instead, it proposes a universal law that is the single path to salvation. The

sharia is understood as a fully comprehensive system of commands that applies in both private and civic spheres. It does not regard the state as an independent object of loyalty, or recognise the secular conception of government that Western societies inherited via Roman law and Christianity. If anything, the austere Muslim conception of law as holy law applying to every area of human life involves a repudiation of the Western ideal of secular democracy, with the attendant and inevitable compromises of the political system. Obedience in Islam is owed first to God, and then to those situated in a descending hierarchy of personal loyalties and obligations.'

I found that helpful in understanding the situation now developing in Iraq, and especially why the United States' policy of establishing a Western-style democracy is being resisted. It reminded me of one of the basic turning points in the Old Testament, the institution of the Kingship. After the period of the Judges, the Israelites demanded a king. They wanted to be like the other nations and to have a king who would lead them out to battle. Samuel, the charismatic religious leader, saw in this demand the rejection of Yahweh as king over Israel; nevertheless, Yahweh instructed him to anoint first Saul and then David to be king. Thereafter the political and religious authority in Israel existed side by side – and in tension. When David abused his power, most notoriously in first seducing Bathsheba, and then arranging for her husband, Uriah, to be killed in battle, Yahweh sent Nathan the prophet to denounce him. Likewise, though for different reasons, Elijah was sent to rebuke King Ahab, and Isaiah was sent to warn King Hezekiah.

The prophets developed a strong social critique of the state, emphasising Yahweh's special concern for the poor and the alien. In developing this critique the prophets went back to the Law given to Moses and set out in the first five books of the Bible, with its emphasis on community, solidarity and justice. One of the striking characteristics of this Law was its unity. No distinction was made between the rules about

religious worship and sacrifices, fair weights and measures in the market, or personal morality. All were equally part of Israel's duty to God; all equally part worship. Sharia has the same characteristic; all its provisions are seen as part of the Muslim's duty to God. It is this sense of unity in the law that we have lost in the West; we no longer believe that all our duties, sacred and secular, are owed to God.

One of the enduring prophetic insights was that Yahweh spoke to his people through the ordinary historical events of the times. If this is a true insight about the nature of God, and I believe that it is, then he must continue to address us in this way. The protest of Islam against Western policy, for which some are prepared to die, should make us think. David Goldberg's students clearly considered western democratic states to have lost something essential for human happiness, and thought a theocratic state to offer a better model. Do we have something to learn?

To take the second point first, it has to be said that the world's experience of theocratic states has not been encouraging, even though that seems to be the original Biblical model. Although Samuel interpreted the demand for a king as the rejection of Yahweh, closer to our time, the American jurist James Madison observed that power is of an encroaching nature, and throughout history it is clear that the concentration of both religious and secular power in one set of hands leads not to liberty but to repression. As Lord Acton famously said, 'Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' The brutal reality of this was seen only too clearly in the régime of Saddam Hussein, and we see it today in Zimbabwe. Power needs to be dispersed, and in Israel after Samuel power was divided between prophet, priest and king. At first this was seen as the rejection of God by Man; but in the light of history I think we should see it as God's wisdom for Man.

But if power is dispersed the risk is that spiritual authority will be eclipsed by more powerful secular interests, and our spiritual needs will be ignored. The realisation of this risk, and its attendant moral decline, is what lies at the root of the Islamic protest. We are, in effect, being reminded of where we began, namely that some common moral and

spiritual foundations are essential if power is to be effectively shared between different authorities in the state. There has to be some agreement on the ends of society and on the means of achieving those ends, if we are to avoid on the one hand repression, and on the other hand anarchy. When the prophets spoke out against the kings of Israel they knew that they accepted the ultimate sovereignty of Yahweh just as they did. It is precisely this common acceptance of authority that we have lost in the West and which the Islamic nations want to preserve. The secular alternatives simply cannot fill the void. We try to cover up the void with ideas like tolerance, political correctness and multiculturalism, but none of these is an adequate basis on which to build a true spiritual foundation. The lack of this foundation is only too apparent in the widespread anxiety of our age and its search for meaning and for roots.

We fail to understand the state properly if we believe it can be established solely on political or economic foundations. States need spiritual foundations also; this, essentially, is what an established Church symbolises, and this is what the sharia provides for an Islamic state. (To say this, of course, is not to agree with every provision of the sharia, e.g. the punishment of stoning for adultery, nor with the repressive means often used to enforce the law.) It ought not to have been a surprise, therefore, when a powerful Islamic movement appeared in Iraq after the war, but it was. Nor should its religious character be a surprise. One of the things that characterised the closing decades of the twentieth century was the rise of religious fundamentalism – not just among Muslims, but among Christians and Hindus also. Religion provides a means of expression for basic human needs, and when those needs are not met and the spiritual side of life is ignored, as in the liberal West, then those needs and that side of life will force themselves upon our attention. And the more they are ignored, the more violent will be the reaction, including people willing to give their lives for the cause, believing that killing others is the right thing to do.

We may be right in our conviction that a theocratic state will not work, but we are mistaken if we think that a state or a world order can exist

without spiritual foundations. This truth began to confront us in the closing years of the twentieth century, beginning with the collapse of Communism, followed by loud and sustained protests against the extension of free market principles into all aspects of social policy, leading in our day to widespread and increasingly violent protests against globalisation, and now the rise of militant Islam. We are simply not prepared to be defined solely as consumers; we are primarily spiritual and moral beings, and it is this that our secular, democratic idea of the state fails to recognise adequately. Religion and politics will always be in tension. This tension is part of the dynamic force necessary for growth, whether political, moral or spiritual. Rather than rubbish religion, our rulers and opinion formers should learn from its wisdom. Reflecting on the collapse of Communism in 1990 Salman Rushdie said:

'As we witness the death of Communism in Central Europe, we cannot fail to observe the deep religious spirit with which the makers of so many of these revolutions are imbued, and we must concede that it is not only a particular ideology that has failed, but the idea that men and women could ever define themselves in terms that exclude their spiritual needs.'

*(The Herbert Read Lecture, February 1990)*

If Rushdie is right, and I believe that he is, and if it is also true that the West so far has not been able to offer a way of regaining the spiritual foundations of the state, then it ought not to surprise us that Islamic states resist a policy of imposing upon them a Western-style liberal democracy in which those foundations will inevitably be eroded. To assume, as Western policy seems to, that we have all the answers and our system works best is tragically to misread the signs of the times.

# CARING FOR THE EARTH

## I Missing the Mark

Michael McCarthy is the environmental correspondent of the *The Independent*. At the beginning of 2005 he attended the conference on climate change called by the Government at the headquarters of the UK Meteorological Office in Exeter. Following the conference he wrote an article in *The Tablet* entitled 'Slouching towards disaster.' Even he and others well versed in the facts and figures were, he says, taken aback by what they heard.

The opening day brought the disclosure of two new threats to the world. The first was the signs that the West Antarctic Ice sheet was about to break up. If it does sea levels will rise by 16 feet! Goodbye London; goodbye Bangladesh. The second was the acidification of the oceans. When the billions of tons of carbon dioxide that human society is producing dissolve in water they produce carbonic acid. But the world's seas are alkaline, as they have been for millions of years, and in this environment thousands of species from plankton to shellfish have evolved. They will not be able to live in an acid sea.

These are not scare stories based on predictions produced by a clever computer programme, they are based on actual observation, on things that are happening now. McCarthy drily comments that these are the conclusions of sober scientists with nary a campaigning environmentalist in sight, and the truly frightening thing is that they believe that these things will happen. As McCarthy and a fellow journalist travelled back from Exeter they reflected on what they had heard. 'It was,' he says, 'the inevitability of what was going to happen, I think, that for the first time struck us with real force: that whatever flapping, floundering efforts humankind eventually makes to try to stop it all, the great ice sheets will melt, the seas will turn acid, the land will burn.' And that brought it home

to me. I felt my spine stiffen as I read that. This is chilling stuff. I'm not programmed to take in that sort of information. I can get my mind around a small pacific island being inundated, but the loss of London...? To understand this I need a new outlook, a new way of looking on what I take for granted. That was also the situation in which Nicodemus found himself when he came to Jesus by night.

Jesus' ministry was about refocussing or lives, helping us to get back on track so that the Kingdom could come in all its fullness. The clever people generally rejected him, and those who thought he might be right found him hard to follow. One such was Nicodemus. He comes to Jesus by night (a sign, perhaps, of his spiritual state – and of the world today); he recognises that Jesus has come from God, his miracles and his words have touched his heart, but he can't quite see where its all leading. Jesus says he needs to be born from above if he is to see the Kingdom, which is where its all leading. In other words, Nicodemus needs a completely new outlook – like being reborn, becoming a new person. And what is the agent of this rebirth? It is the Spirit, which like the wind blows where it wills, beyond our control. If you want to see where its all leading, says Jesus, you have to let go and let God put his Spirit within you.

Its the same for us. We do not face simply an ecological crisis or a technological crisis; we face a spiritual crisis, because climate change is at root about what we worship. Having our own way, being in control, increasing consumption and power are what matter to most of us, rather than God and his Kingdom. We are out of focus, we have missed the mark in the most desperate way. In a word we're in a state of sin like never before.

Sin is state of separation from God, falling short of that fullness of life held out to us by Jesus. Sin is the failure to receive the gift that God offers us. Generally we think of sin in terms of wicked and wrongful acts. They are, of course, sins, and they have a major part in causing global warming, like the destruction of rain forests, the reckless pursuit of economic growth, the desire to maintain our wasteful way of life, and so on. These are the equivalent of the last six commandments, e.g., murder, theft,

adultery, and coveting. But these things do not go to the heart of sin. The heart of sin is to be found in the first four commandments, which begin, 'I am the Lord your God ... you must have no other God besides me.' The first four commandments require us to honour God as the only God, not some graven image of our own making; the last six are manifestations of the failure to honour the first four commandments, each one placing some object, attitude or desire in place of God as the thing we worship. Sin is the state of living our lives out of focus, off beam, missing the mark.

God has shown us how to hit the mark, to live our lives focussed on him and his Kingdom, how to care for the earth and for our neighbour. He promised through Abraham that through him all the families of the earth might be blessed. But we have ignored his commandments, exploited the earth, and turned his blessing into blight. And worse than this, is the perverse way that Exxon, the multi-national oil company funds (to the tune of millions of pounds) groups and others who maintain that climate change is not happening. Indeed this is worse than perverse, it is wicked; a blatant example of profit and corporate wealth being put before the common good. So bad is Exxon's record that the Royal Society was moved, for the first time in its history, to write to the company about its misleading and inaccurate statements which are simply not consistent with the scientific literature. And other ideologically motivated groups in the USA, like the Competitive Enterprise Institute, dismiss global warming as a myth. Whilst these views can themselves be dismissed as wicked, the danger now is that those who accept the science will not find the will to act effectively. George Monbiot writing in *The Guardian* (21.9.06), says, 'If the biosphere is wrecked, it will not be done by those who couldn't give a damn about it, as they now belong to a diminishing minority. It will be destroyed by nice, well-meaning, cosmopolitan people who accept the case for cutting emissions, but who won't change by one iota the way they live.'

There is nothing automatic about the survival of life on this planet; our freedom is part of God's gift, and if we abuse it then we shall perish. We know from our childhood lessons about the dinosaurs and the Ice Age

that life has perished from the earth before. Of course its not all down to us. God has not retired from the scene; he still cares for his creation and works ceaselessly to bring it to the fulfilment that is his will. He has given us the skills we need, even to combat this crisis. In 1998 I heard a talk by Sir John Houghton, then vice-chairman of the International Panel on Climate Change, who said precisely that. God is not indifferent; as St John says, he sent his Son not to condemn the world but that through him the world might be saved (John 3.17). But it seems he will not do it without our co-operation.

In the present crisis, to be sure we need all the help technology can provide, but above all, like Nicodemus, we need a new spirit, a new way of looking at things. How else will we be able to make the life-style changes that are required – reducing our use of energy, or paying more for cleaner energy from renewable resources? How else will be able to re-conceive our economics and move away from a consumer economy? How else will we find the generosity to support and absorb those displaced from their lands and homes as the seas rise? Such profound changes in outlook can only be described as a new birth, an awakening from sin.

Some years ago the writer Coleen McCulloch wrote a book called *A Creed for the Third Millennium*. It is set in the USA; climate change has begun to bite, affecting the way people live their lives. Energy and materials like paper are in limited supply. The President begins a search for someone who can preach a new gospel (he doesn't call it that, of course) to help people cope with the changes that are upon them. Such a man is found who helps people look at their situation with new eyes. At first he is listened to, he is on the news and all the chat shows, but as the story unfolds things turn against him. Eventually he senses that he must give his life for the people. The book ends on an enigmatic note; it is not clear what effect his death has: are we saved or do we perish?

It would be nice to end on a reassuring note, but we can't. We have missed the mark on a colossal scale, and the effects of such sin cannot be quickly overcome. We know disaster is round the corner, but on what scale depends on us. Unlike Coleen McCulloch's book there will be no

new saviour; there is only one saviour and he has shown us how to live. We know that God will do his part; the question is will we repent and do ours? Even now, says the Lord, rend your hearts, return to me, be born again and be healed.

# REMEMBERING

## I Sixty Years On

*An Address given at a Service to Commemorate the Sixtieth Anniversary of VE Day, 10 July 2005*

Two years ago I went on pilgrimage to Italy in the steps of St Benedict and St Francis. We began at Montecassino, a hill that commands the valley below and where St Benedict founded his monastery. Towards the end of the Second World War the German Army occupied the monastery and Montecassino became the site of a fierce battle as the allies tried to displace them. Huge casualties were suffered on both sides. Before climbing the hill to visit the monastery, we visited the British War Cemetery; we prayed for those who had died, and we prayed for peace. I find war cemeteries very moving. There in front of me lie those who gave their lives for me. I'm moved by the order and the regularity of the graves that stands in marked contrast to the chaos and ugliness of battle; in the calm and quietness I hear the questions that the noise of battle drowns out: 'Why then? Why there? Why thus, did they die?'

Climbing the hill you come to another cemetery where, on the hillside, more than 1000 Polish soldiers are buried. I found this even more moving, perhaps because so many of them were young men: eighteen, nineteen, early twenties, very few were older. Their graves are arranged in terraces on the hillside, and there was a continual procession of pilgrims who, like us, had come to pray and to remember. The inscription in the Polish Cemetery reads, 'We, Polish soldiers have given our bodies to Italy, our hearts to Poland and our souls to God for our own freedom and for the freedom of others.' Today we remember those Polish soldiers; we remember the British soldiers who fought with them, and all who died for the cause of freedom.

To be human is to remember. Without memories life would be a series of incidents without meaning or connection. Memory connects our past to our present and gives us our future. Without memory we should have no idea of what it means to be British or Polish, or a Christian, or to be free. For Christians remembrance is a strong word. It is much more than reminiscing, bringing to mind old times and then putting them back to sleep. Remembrance recalls the past with power and allows it to shape our future; memories of war have that power. In May 1999 there took place the last annual pilgrimage of the Dunkirk veterans to the beaches in France from which they were rescued. John Davidson of *The Independent*, began his report: 'The white-whiskered Royal Navy veteran, both sides of his chest heavy with medals, shook uncontrollable with grief while still standing to attention. A young woman silently passed him paper handkerchiefs.' Standing there on the beach brought it all back. The old man's grief expressed the power of his memories. He could see it all: the rescue craft, the crowds trying to climb aboard; those who made it, and those who didn't. He could feel it all again; and he lived it all again.

That is a very moving picture of the power of memory, but on the whole we tend to forget rather than remember, and as we know, those who fail to remember the past are condemned to repeat it. Adrian Hamilton, writing about the VE Day celebrations in Moscow earlier this year, said that almost every issue raised by the end of the Second World War remains unresolved. If that is true, then we have failed to remember, and we have not fully honoured those who died. How might we remember better, connecting our past to our present and giving us a new future?

Today we remember the sacrifice of so many thousands of lives. Men and women, civilian and military, cut down in conflict like those killed in London on Thursday. They remind us that sacrifice brings hope. That so many were willing to defend their country and its values with their lives gave us hope in our darkest hour. Today the problems that confront us, from global warming to human cloning, from poverty in Africa to conflict in the Middle East, are so huge that hope seems to have died. Morally we have lost our way, and no one can find the map. In Jesus God has shown

us that love is the way. Love means taking everyone's interests seriously, and putting the needs of others before the needs of self. We see what this means internationally in the campaign to remit the unpayable debts of the world's poorest nations; we see what it means personally in the selfless devotion of carers to those for whom they care. Love requires sacrifice, as these examples show. We can learn from our memories that when we are willing to make sacrifices hope is re-born, and we are given the moral resources to tackle the problems that confront us.

Today we remember community. War and atrocities like '9/11' and the London bombings bring people together; differences are put aside as we tackle a situation that threatens to overwhelm us all. So many memories of the war are about the strength and resolve that came through the renewed sense of community that it created. They remind us that community has a moral basis; it is not just an association of the like-minded, or those of the same race or religion. Community that divides and separates is not true community. True community unites; it provides a space in which the flames of suspicion and mistrust that conflict creates can be doused; it respects the dignity of difference and enables divisions to be overcome. Nazism and its racist beliefs may have been defeated in 1945, but the power of these beliefs was not destroyed, as we see in the desecration of Jewish cemeteries and the abuse of Arab prisoners at Abu Ghraib. Behind these beliefs is a refusal to accept those who are different as fully human like ourselves. But our memories remind us that we sink or swim together; the same blood runs through our veins and was shed in the cause of peace. Community will be regained when we accept that we are children of the same heavenly Father and are all equal in his sight.

Today we remember that our cause was freedom. We fought to free Poland and other European nations from oppression; to free the Jews from extermination; and to free the world of an ideology that corrupted humanity. We knew that freedom and peace meant the presence of justice, not just the absence of conflict. But we have forgotten, and we misunderstand the nature of freedom. The freedom that is prized today is the absence of restraint, of being beholden to no one, free to do your own

thing. We see this in intimate relations, and we see it also in economic policy. But this freedom has not brought the world justice, nor has it brought us happiness. Perhaps you watched the recent BBC series *The Monastery*. It was about five men who spent forty days at Worth Abbey in Sussex searching for inner peace. And for each of the five men there are countless thousands who are looking for something deeper to sustain them than the choices on offer in a materialistic world. We are free, but we are chained. The only freedom worth having is the freedom to be our true selves, and this requires the acceptance of commitment. Our true self is something given, not attained. The sacrifice and comradeship of war were only possible because we were committed, to each other and to the justice of our cause. These commitments provided the moral framework in which we could flourish as people and as a nation despite adversity. So today we will not be truly free until we accept the commitments that justice requires.

Today we remember the power of our delusions, especially the temptation of the powerful to believe that God is on their side, and that force is justified to enforce their will. This was the prevailing view when Ahab was King of Israel. There is, alas, a similar belief among Muslim extremists, and, we are told, among some of those who advise President Bush. Against those who believe this we have to set the words of Jesus, 'Blessed are the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' (Cf. *Matthew 5.1-11*) Jesus makes it plain that war cannot be an instrument of God's will. We may have to resist evil and violence with force, as in the Second World War, but war can never be an instrument of policy. It seems to me that the widespread unease over the war in Iraq was precisely because we forgot this. War is a blunt instrument; it creates as many problems as it solves; peace requires another way.

In the cemeteries at Montecassino, as with the war memorials in the towns and villages of our land, the focus is a cross. The Cross is the sign of Christ who came to show us another way. He offered his life in sacrifice, and showed us what true love means; he founded a community

built on justice, and who taught us that in service we would find our freedom. Perhaps our greatest forgetting is the belief we can do without God, and our greatest delusion that we can succeed in our own strength. As Jesus said, 'Blessed are those who know their need of God.' He shows us that it is in God's strength alone that we shall learn from our memories and truly honour those who died.

## II A Baltic Journey

I don't know quite what I expected when I and a small group of pilgrims set out on a pilgrimage to Latvia and Estonia in September 2006, but I do know that as we came to the end of our journey we had touched something deep, and which touches on the themes of these reflections. We went because the people of these lands had lived under oppression like the Israelites, and I thought there might be parallels in their different experiences. Unlike other pilgrimages there were no shrines at which to pray, no paths to follow on which Jesus or St Paul had walked, no place hallowed and remembered as holy ground. All pilgrimages are an inward journey, but none quite like this. As we learnt about the history of occupation we learnt also about the strength of the human spirit and the enduring nature of hope. The experience was, it seemed to me, of something basic about being human which is prior to religion, and which religion is meant to nurture and express.

The history of occupation in the Baltic States goes back to the thirteenth century when the Pope called for a crusade against the pagan lands around the Baltic Sea. He accepted the offer of the Danish king to invade, and since then, with brief intervals, they have always been under foreign domination. Danes, Swedes, Germans, Poles and Russians have been their

overlords. The best documented period, and the most appalling, was that from 1940 to 1991 when first the Russians, then the Nazis, and then the Russians again, invaded and brutally suppressed the national culture and identity. These three small states were pawns in the political manoeuvres of the powerful, and it was chilling to see in the Occupation Museum in Riga a copy of the map that Molotov and Ribbentrop signed in 1939 dividing Europe into Soviet and Nazi zones. With a stroke of the pen the fate of innocent millions was decided. Not surprisingly, their present freedom feels very new and vulnerable. The population of Riga, the capital of Latvia, is still 70% Russian and Russian is still the most widely spoken language in the city. I asked our guide in Estonia whether their freedom felt permanent since they had joined the EU and NATO a few years ago; she replied, 'We don't think about it.' And then she added, 'We're always looking over our shoulders at Russia.'

Apart from a day visit to Czechoslovakia (as it then was) in the 1970s, this was my first experience of the effects of an ideological system and the lies upon which it is based. One of the malign characteristics of soviet rule was to use the language of freedom to disguise oppression. The Baltic countries were 'invited' to join the Soviet Union; their decision to do so was presented as their free and enlightened choice, when precisely the opposite was the case. This perversion of the truth seems to be one of the characteristics of ideology. An ideology is always a closed system, a claim to a total explanation of how things are. Because of this an ideology is always enslaving: the facts have to be made to fit the theory, because it is the theory that legitimises power and authority. In religious language, an ideology is a false god. Those of ideological conviction do not have to engage with those who disagree; they can simply dismiss them as wrong. Christians have been guilty of turning the faith into an ideology, a closed system that offers a total explanation. Galileo encountered this when the Church rejected his discovery that the earth revolves around the sun, as did the blacks of South Africa when the system of apartheid was imposed upon them; and today the convictions of the neo-cons in the Bush administration appear more ideological than Christian, with disastrous

consequences for the people of Iraq. Terrorism also seems to be ideologically driven, whatever the justice of the cause that provoked unrest in the first place. In the same way the insistence on so-called free market solutions by economists and others has all the zeal of the ideologically driven. Whether of the left or the right, whether religious or secular, ideology makes the same false claim to be a complete system, and everything is explained with reference to its theories. I used to think that there must be a distinctively Christian political position, but I have changed my mind. There is a distinctive Christian understanding of what it means to be human, of the dignity of the human person, and of what makes for human flourishing, but there is no single way of translating that understanding into social and political terms. Christianity provides a framework within which power should be exercised, and that is its challenge to rulers. The Kingdom values briefly set out in the first of these reflections are eternal; they are the values that any political system should respect.

In both capitals, as in many former soviet-bloc countries, the main public square is called 'Freedom Square'. The freedom celebrated in Riga and Tallinn is liberation, overthrowing the oppressor and regaining the ability to pursue their own aims and recapture their national identity – the collective equivalent of becoming your true self. Both the Nazis and the Russians set out to change the identity of their subject countries, importing their citizens, their language, their culture and their currency. In pre-communist times the Russians also imported their religion, and imposing Orthodox Cathedrals were built in both capitals, the unmistakable symbols of power and domination. All the powerful do this. It is exactly what China is doing now in Tibet; it is what Muhammed did as Islam was spread in its first years by military conquest; and it is what Christians have done in the Crusades, and by the Inquisition in South America and elsewhere. Forcible conversion was the Pope's policy in the Baltic, and in England the Anglican Church opposed dissent in its early years.

In the euphoria of liberation it is easy to assume that freedom consists simply in the absence of constraint, and in some extreme libertarian views that indeed is the case. But this is not an adequate view of freedom because it takes no account of the imbalance of power and resources between rich and poor. The result of this view of freedom is the growth of an underclass, effectively cut off from participation in society. This is not the Biblical view of freedom. Freedom is a common possession before it is a personal possession, and it is given for a purpose beyond that of personal indulgence. Liberation from oppression is 'freedom from', but it also needs to be understood as 'freedom for'. Crossing the Red Sea as they escaped from slavery in Egypt, the Israelites knew that they were liberated from slavery in Egypt, but also for the glory of God. Their liberty was not to do their own thing, but to worship God and to build a society founded on his laws. The basic unit of Israelite society, as we have seen, is the-person-in-community, and working according to that concept requires both discipline and self-sacrifice, and the creation of a moral society.

While in the early years the resistance to Nazi and Soviet rule was military, with groups of freedom fighters hiding in the forests, it was for the most part in the hearts of the people who kept alive the dream that one day they would be free. In Tallinn we visited the arena where the triennial Song Festival takes place. These festivals, which kept going during the Soviet era, were powerful expressions of that dream, even if during the years of oppression the people had to sing their oppressor's songs. This festival ground was the place of a major protest by half-a-million people as the Soviet Union began to founder, and to stand there and imagine the scene was a deep experience. In that arena over the years a spiritual battle was being fought. And this in the end was the undoing of the Soviet Union: it collapsed under the weight of its inherent moral contradictions. This pilgrimage reminded me that the real battle is always spiritual. Margaret Thatcher recognised this in the early days of her privatisation programme, speaking of which she said, 'Economics is the method; the aim is to change the soul.' At the time I found that remark

chilling, a grim reminder of the way rulers regard the ruled, but the battle is always for hearts and minds. How we organise society, regulate personal relations, promote the creation of wealth and control its use, all raise the questions of what it means to be human, the purpose of life and the ends towards which it is directed. These are spiritual questions. The collapse of communism left capitalism as the only viable economic system, and the challenge to capitalism in our day is to feed the human spirit as well as human material needs and desires. Pope John Paul II put it well in his encyclical letter *Centesimus Annus*, written in 1991, where he drew parallels between the two systems. The underlying fault of both, he said, was their misconception of the nature of the human person which led to a distorted view of human freedom and human society. He criticised both communism and capitalism for their exaltation of the economic over the spiritual:

‘when the affluent consumer society ... seeks to defeat Marxism on the level of pure materialism by showing how a free-market society can achieve a greater satisfaction of material needs than Communism, while equally excluding spiritual values ... it agrees with Marxism, in the sense that it totally reduces man to the sphere of economics and the satisfaction of material needs.’

*(Centesimus Annus, s.19)*

The Baltic states have, of course, embraced the capitalist system, but a visit to the Art Museum in Tallinn offers a reminder of its spiritual impoverishment. The collection is presented on three floors: on the first floor paintings of the nineteenth century and earlier show scenes from ordinary life, some of exceptional beauty. People are shown realistically, whether in wealth or poverty, but with dignity. You sense an inner spirit. The second floor shows paintings from the communist era in what might be described as the ‘heroic worker’ style. The spirit is different, the realism is ideological, the language of dignity (the dignity of the worker) is used to mask the brutality of the system and its erosion of individuality.

On the third floor are modern works from the post-communist period; angular and disjointed, crude nudes and nakedness often suggesting exploitation. It repelled rather than attracted. As you ascend through the museum so you descend in sensitivity; the journey is from beauty to brutalism; from hope to despair. In the pictures on the second and third floors we see the effects of all-embracing ideologies. Communism reduced man to being an economic agent; capitalism has reduced him to being a consumer. Everything, even the body and sex have been commodified, transmuted into things to consume and to satisfy our appetites. On the first floor we were drawn into the experience of the subject; on the top floor we remain outside, we are simply voyeurs. If the overthrow of communism was the triumph of hope, the advent of the consumer society is destroying it. It was a sobering reflection.

One of the casualties of a closed system is hope. Hope is a virtue, an inner disposition of the heart, something God-given that forms character and keeps us in touch with what is true and upright. Those who allow themselves to live by a lie lose touch with virtue and in them hope dies. But there are always those who resist, and they keep hope alive. We read their stories in the Occupation Museum in Riga. Visiting the museum was at the same time compelling and chilling. The story of oppression was appalling, but there was a continual undercurrent in the story of a refusal to give way, a refusal to abandon what everyone knew to be right. Hope inspired not only the acts of resistance (and there is a time when evil has to be resisted by force), but also the inward rejection of values that people were forced to conform to outwardly. Hope gave the people the courage to endure and the strength to seize the moment of liberation when it came. In the end hope overcame; evil cannot prevail.

Part of our journey was along the Baltic Way, the road linking the three capitals, Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn. In August 1989, on the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, two million people joined hands along this road in a mass protest and demand for freedom. As we drove along the road I kept seeing in my mind's eye those people joined hand-to-hand in a powerful expression of hope. This is the

lasting memory of the journey. Wherever we went it felt as though a new identity was was being forged, or rather a lost identity was being regained. It is that sort of spirit that we need to regain. We may face huge challenges, particularly in the care of the environment, but our resources are adequate to our needs. The real battle is within.